

Recommendations for a Transit Priority Policy - Final Report

Background

The City Manager was directed to develop recommendations for a Transit Priority Policy that would provide guidance for the provisions of various types of transit priority treatments on city streets and roadways. [Resolution No. 20160414-007](#), continues as follows:

A Transit Priority Policy would consider, without limitation:

1. potential goals and metrics for transit priority, including improved safety, increased person-carrying capacity of existing streets, and efficiency and reliability of transit service;
2. potential criteria and conditions to identify corridors for which transit priority should be considered;
3. potential agreements with Capital Metro for transit service level commitments on corridors for which transit priority is provided;
4. alignment with existing plans and policies, including without limitation:
 - a) Austin Strategic Mobility Plan;
 - b) Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, including existing and projected development in activity corridors and centers;
 - c) Downtown Austin Plan;
 - d) CAMPO 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan;
 - e) Project Connect Regional System Vision; and
 - f) Capital Metro's Service Plan (*Connections 2025*) and Service Guidelines and Standards.

The recommendations for a Transit Priority Policy should include a process for how the community shall be informed and engaged when application of a transit priority treatment is proposed.

Furthermore, the City Manager was directed to collaborate with Capital Metro, engage relevant city boards and commissions, and stakeholder groups in the development of recommendations for a Transit Priority Policy and provide a final report on such recommendations to the Council Mobility Committee.

Policy Research

As directed, Austin Transportation Department and Capital Metro staff collaborated through an existing Transit Priority Working Group to gather input from stakeholder groups and explore national best practice regarding transit priority policies.

Staff from both agencies presented the elements that were outlined in the Resolution to the Alliance for Public Transportation, Planning Commission, Urban Transportation Commission, and Austinites for Urban Rail Action (AURA). These stakeholder groups focused on the criteria to consider should a Transit Priority Policy be recommended. It was recognized that all of the elements for a Transit Priority Policy exist in Austin, but that a greater need exists to integrate all previous plans and work to prioritize overlapping modes. Through existing Active Transportation and Sidewalk Programs the City actively focuses on expanding bicycle and pedestrian facilities but it was recognized that a more multimodal approach including transit is required and a policy should explicitly mention this integration. The stakeholder groups further discussed the value of including transit service criteria when identifying transit priority lanes, such as bus frequency, transit ridership/people throughput, and reduction in

vehicle-miles traveled, and the importance of evaluating before and after metrics to measure success. Engaging the public was also an important aspect of implementing transit priority treatments in order to get public support as well as to educate the public on how the treatment works. No action was taken by the groups.

Additional research of national best practice found that transit priority policies and application of treatments varied across the nation in varying degrees of Transit Priority Elements. Most commonly, transit priority policies were integrated within the larger context of a Transportation Plan or the application of transit priority treatments had just become common practice from decades of acceptance. Transit priority can be seen in the form of policy statements, similar to Imagine Austin's directive to "give transit priority". San Francisco amended the City and County's General Plan in 2007 with a Transit-Frist Policy (Appendix A) that outlined ten principals in which all officers, boards, commissions, and departments shall implement, similar to the City of Austin Complete Streets Policy. Transit Priority Programs can be created to build capital projects and prioritize investments. King County Metro's Transit Speed and Reliability Program partners with cities to identify and prioritize projects to improve transit performance (Appendix B). Other ways to reflect transit priority are to adopt a map of modal priorities in the transportation network, similar to the Transportation Framework Plan within the Downtown Austin Master Plan. The Los Angeles 2035 Mobility Plan developed a Transit Enhanced Network map (Appendix C) which identified three levels of transit enhancements by corridor with specific objectives, such as increasing bus frequency along 100% of the Transit Enhanced Network by 2035. Furthermore, transit priority policies can be reflected by naming specific projects and identifying specific transit priority treatments, whether it be a transit priority lane on a specific street or a transit queue jump at a specific intersection. The District of Columbia's MoveDC Plan adopted a 2-year Action Plan (Appendix D) which identified streets for dedicated bus lanes, Transit Signal Priority technology at specific intersections, and various other named transit priority treatment projects.

Current Policy

Absent of a Transit Priority Policy and under general guidance from Imagine Austin, ATD and Capital Metro have been able to take measures to move transit priority projects forward and implement transit priority treatments. Examples of this can be seen in the following projects:

- Transit Priority Lanes and Transit Queue Jumps on Guadalupe and Lavaca Streets.
- Transit Signal Priority technology along the length of the MetroRapid routes, which holds the signal's green time longer in order for the bus to make it through the light instead of being stopped at red.
- Express Buses on the MoPac Managed Lanes to access downtown
- 2016 Mobility Bond funding to support transit improvements along major corridors

Furthermore, since 2016, transit priority treatments have been strategically evaluated in a collaborative effort by ATD and Capital Metro under the Transit Priority Working Group (TPWG). The purpose of the TPWG is to identify and develop short, medium and long term opportunities and resource needs to prioritize transit through key areas while being mindful of overall travel for all modes (transit, auto, pedestrians and bicycle) and to serve as the first point of contact between agencies on issues that affect operations between all modes. The TPWG has proven to be a successful model over the past year and is being considered for dedicated staff resources to coordinate, design and implement TPWG projects.

Recommendations for a Transit Priority Policy

ATD and Capital Metro staff recommend that a Transit Priority Policy be developed as part of the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) process. The ASMP will allow the City and public to evaluate overlapping modal plans and identify priorities in the transportation network through the scenario planning process, which the stakeholder groups identified. The ASMP is the framework for transit priority policy statements to be made and programs to be identified to support the implementation of transit priority treatments. Furthermore, the ASMP will allow named projects of transit priority treatments to be identified by specific streets and intersections, as the MoveDC Action Plan identified. This approach will be the most comprehensive solution to an issue that deserves the greatest level of attention, as the public identified during the Mobility Talks public engagement effort to develop the 2016 Mobility Bond.